

P 050514Z FEB 02
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4935
INFO AIT TAIPEI 9702
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMCONSUL SHENYANG
AMCONSUL SHANGHAI
AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 001019

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/12
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HU JINTAO IN THE MEDIA LIMELIGHT

REF: BEIJING 585

(U) CLASSIFIED BY JON ALOISI, POLITICAL MINISTER-
COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.5(B,D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) CHINESE MEDIA ARE GIVING INCREASING PROMINENCE TO HU JINTAO IN A CLEAR SIGNAL TO CHINA'S DOMESTIC AUDIENCE THAT HE HAS CONSOLIDATED HIS POSITION AS CHINA'S NEXT PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY AND STATE PRESIDENT. WE EXPECT HU'S PUBLIC PROFILE TO CONTINUE TO RISE AS CHINA MOVES CLOSER TO THE 2002/2003 LEADERSHIP TRANSITION. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) POLITBURO STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBER AND STATE VICE PRESIDENT HU JINTAO IS WIDELY EXPECTED TO REPLACE JIANG ZEMIN AS PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY (AT THIS FALL'S 16TH PARTY CONGRESS) AND STATE PRESIDENT (DURING THE MARCH 2003 10TH NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS). OVER RECENT WEEKS, CHINESE MEDIA HAVE INCREASED THEIR COVERAGE OF HU'S ACTIVITIES. A YEAR AGO, PRESS COVERAGE OF HU, WHO RANKS FIFTH IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP, FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON HIS ACTIVITIES AS PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL PARTY SCHOOL. TODAY'S COVERAGE IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO PORTRAY HU IN LEADING ROLES.

¶3. (U) WHILE CHINA'S STATE-RUN MEDIA HAS NOT ALTERED THE FORMAL ORDER DICTATING THAT COVERAGE OF HU COMES AFTER THAT OF JIANG ZEMIN, ZHU RONGJI, LI PENG AND LI RUIHUA, HU JINTAO'S INCREASINGLY PROMINENT ROLE IS CLEAR IN THE CONTENT AND LENGTH OF HIS COVERAGE. THE AUTHORITATIVE FEBRUARY 4 TV EVENING NEWS BROADCAST, FOR EXAMPLE, BEGAN WITH A SEVEN-MINUTE REPORT ON HU'S SPEECH -- REPRESENTING THE PARTY'S CENTER, THE STATE COUNCIL AND THE CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION -- AT A SPRING FESTIVAL RECEPTION FOR HUNDREDS OF RETIRED SENIOR CADRES.

¶4. (U) A REVIEW OF THE OFFICIAL PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA OVER THE PAST MONTH CONFIRMS THAT HU'S ACTIVITIES ARE APPEARING MORE FREQUENTLY AND PLACED MORE PROMINENTLY. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR, HU HAS BEEN REPORTED MAKING APPEARANCES AND "IMPORTANT SPEECHES" AT A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT OCCASIONS. THESE INCLUDE HIS "IMPORTANT SPEECH" JANUARY 11 TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PARTY PROPAGANDA CHIEFS (JIANG MADE THE KEYNOTE SPEECH IN 2001) AND HIS JANUARY 21 MEETING WITH PROMINENT AMERICAN VISITORS -- HIS FIRST SUCH ENCOUNTER (REFTEL).

¶5. (U) FURTHER REFLECTING HIS ELEVATED STATUS, HU RECEIVED TOP-RANK BILLING AT THE JANUARY 25 CONFERENCE COMMEMORATING THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF JIANG'S "EIGHT-POINT PROPOSAL" (WHERE QIAN QICHEN PROPOSED ADJUSTMENTS TO CHINA'S CROSS-STRAIT POLICY). HE ALSO PARTICIPATED -- ALONGSIDE JIANG -- IN A FEBRUARY 2 CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION RECEPTION HONORING RETIRED MILITARY CADRES AND WAS "IN CHARGE" AT CEREMONY THAT SAME DAY JOINTLY

SPONSORED BY THE PARTY AND THE STATE COUNCIL HONORING
OUTSTANDING SCIENTISTS.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) WHILE CHINA HAS MOVED QUITE FAR BEYOND THE DAYS
WHEN ANALYSTS POURED OVER PICTURES IN THE PEOPLE'S DAILY
TO PUZZLE OUT LEADERSHIP TRENDS, THE REGIME REMAINS
SURPRISINGLY RIGID IN ITS MEDIA TREATMENT OF ITS
LEADERS. FOR DAILY VIEWERS OF THE CHINESE-LANGUAGE
NEWS, HU'S RISE IN STATUE IS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT
THE LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IS PROCEEDING ACCORDING TO THE
EXPECTED PLAN.

RANDT